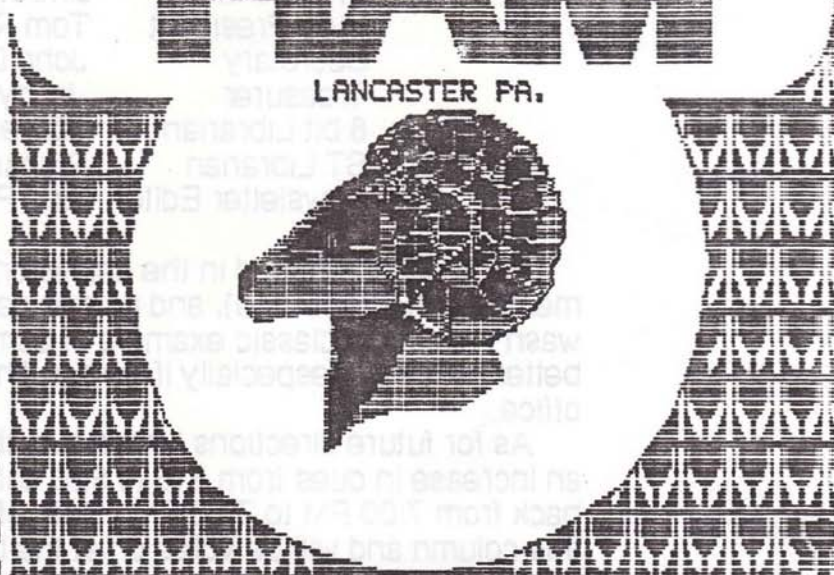


December, 1987

**RAM**

LANCASTER PA.



RED ROSE ATARI MEMBERS (RAM) is an organization of ATARI computer enthusiasts. The General meeting is held on the second Tuesday of the month at the Millersville Student Activity building at 7:00 P.M. Any and all articles in this newsletter may be reprinted so long as formal credit is given to the original source. The club Board Meeting is held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30.

**1988 Officers**President:Vice President:Secretary:Treasurer:

Jim Stokes

Tom Ruffhead

John Deni

Jennie Rodriguez

"It is the policy of this organization that software pirating and theft of intellectual property is incompatible with the goals of RAM. Any member found pirating software at organizational events will be expelled." (Re: RAM Constitution)

NOTE: Any and all club oriented mail should be addressed to :

RAM

c/o (Officer's name)

P.O. Box 7532

Lancaster, PA 17604

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Review of  
Sub Battle



## Presidents Corner

As you may or may not know, last month we had our election of officers, the following are the results.

President	Jim Stokes
Vice-President	Tom Ruffhead
Secretary	John Deni
Treasurer	Jenny Rodriguez
8 bit Librarian	Steve Pandich
ST Librarian	Richard Ross
Newsletter Editor	Eric Fulmer

For those interested in the details only 17 people voted (out of 19 R.A.M. members in attendance), and no one sent any ballots in through the mail so it wasn't exactly a classic example of democracy in action. Perhaps we will do better next time, especially if we can find more than one candidate for each office.

As for future directions I have two changes I would like to see discussed, an increase in dues from \$15 to \$20 dollars a year and moving the meeting time back from 7:00 PM to 7:30 PM. Both of these proposals will be discussed in this column and will be voted on at the board meeting and if passed, before the general membership. There are also new avenues to be explored and new directions R.A.M. can take, if you have any suggestions you would like to see introduced to the board or general membership let me know and I'll be glad to bring it up. You can give me a call at home or leave a message on "lims" Co-op.

A problem has developed about meeting at the SMAC on Tuesday nights, it seems that the building manager forgot to send me a room request for next semester (and I forgot to remind her) as a result all the rooms are booked up on Tuesday night for next semester and so we have to find another meeting night. I have tentatively scheduled our meetings for Wednesday night (beginning in February, the January meeting will be on Tuesday as usual), this will be discussed in detail at the January meeting so if Wednesday night is bad for you plan to attend and express your opinions on the subject. I selected Wednesday night because rooms 108-109 (our usual rooms) were open all semester. I can look into the possibility of other rooms on other nights if its necessary.

Congratulations are in order for Jim and Sharon Godfrey, they are the proud parents of a baby girl which they've named Kristin Marie, she weighed in at 8 pounds, 1.5 ozs and was 19.5 inches long.

Well, thats it for my first PRESIDENTS CORNER, I may not write a column every month, it will depend on whether I have anything to say. I will continue to write SHORT NOTES every month so you may find some of the club news there if there isn't enough information for a Presidents column.

-Jim Stokes



## Short Notes

By

Jim Stokes

If you own a modem you should give Jims' Co-op a call, we have about 3 megabytes of 8 bit downloads and about 8 megabytes of ST downloads with new programs being uploaded every week. I upload about 360k of ST programs each week and Mark Gamber has been scouring BBSs all over the country for new 8 bit downloads. All this stuff will make it into our library (8 bit and ST) but we are hoping that people with modems will call the board and download the programs they want that way there will be more time for copies for the non-modem owners at the meeting. In addition to the downloads there are on-line games and a poll for R.A.M. members on future directions the club should take. There is a general message base as well as a swap board (where someone has 2 520 color systems, each with an extra drive for \$500 a piece), an ST board, 8 bit board and the Public Affairs board for discussing the issues of the day. Give it a call at 872-6068.

An issue of Analog/ST Log has not been produced since September, the publishers are having financial problems and hope to produce a new edition soon. They insist that all subscribers will receive the issues they are owed. I wish them luck, Analog and ST Log are my two favorite Atari magazines.

The EXGS (the combination game system/computer) is said to be selling very well (Atari expects to sell 120,000 units this Christmas) this may be good news for 8 bit users, it's introduction may bring software publishers back to the 8 bit market. While initially any new software will probably be games, there may be other types of software available later.

MicroSoft Write, another sophisticated word processor for the ST, should be available soon, the manuals arrived at Atari on December 11th and there were just a few loose ends to take care of before its release. The suggested retail price will be \$129.

All of Atari's new hardware products have overtaxed their Taiwan production facilities, there have been rumors about a shortage of 520 and 1040s (although there doesn't seem to be a problem here) and this also explains why the Megas aren't in wide distribution yet. Look for Atari to open a new manufacturing facility, probably in Santa Clara California.

Atari is working on a 68030 processor as an add on for the Mega, it will require the serial bus to work so it won't work on the 520/1040s. According to Neal Harris it just wasn't possible to make it available for the older machines because of their closed architecture. There is no word on when this will be available or the cost but it will use a Unix like operating system.



The new XF551 disk drive for the 8 bit is expected to be available sometime after January, this is the replacement for the 1050 which will read single, density and a half and double density. It will feature high speed read/write commands and will be double sided, double density (360k per disk), and the list price is expected to be under \$200.

Last month I told how production problems with the blitter chip had led Atari to drop some of those features, according to Neal Harris that isn't true, the blitter has all the features it was designed to have. Blitter upgrades for 520/1040 users are being held up because of problems with production of the blitter designed for that upgrade. The megas will have a different shaped blitter than the older machines and while it was thought to be trivial to redesign the chip, this hasn't been the case. The new blitter will be released with new ROMs designed to take advantage of the chip as well as correct a few bugs, the upgrade is expected to be about \$125. The Roms will be available separately for those that don't want the blitter, the cost is expect to be about \$50 for the Roms only.

Atari has been shipping the XEP-80, the new 80 column card for about a month, they are also finalizing AtariWriter 80 and Silent Butler 80. Silent Butler 80 will be an upgrade available from Atari but AtariWriter 80 will be a completely separate program that EXP-80 owners will have to buy, and it will only work with the XEP-80. Dalle Electronics has had several XEP-80s in stock and sold them, they expect to have it back in stock by the time you read this but AtariWriter 80 still isn't available.

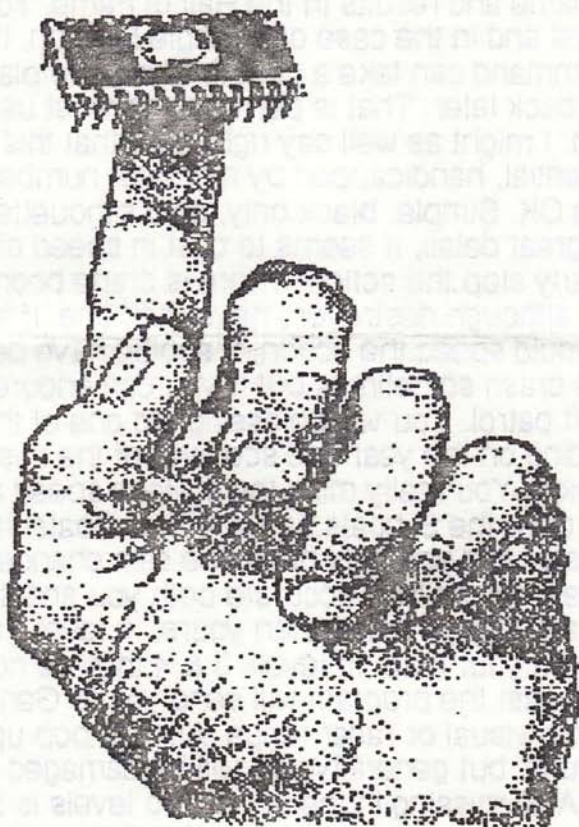
Metacom's new version of ST Basic is now available from Atari, it comes in a ziplock bag with a small manual for about \$20. There is a more detailed manual available from Atari for an additional fee. If your looking for a cheap basic than DBasic may be for you, the software is available from the club for free, the manual will cost you \$5.00, which goes into the club treasury. If your looking for something more serious, then GFA Basic may be for you, it costs about \$70 but has become the standard Basic for the ST. While it has a few bugs and isn't thought of as an serious development tool, it is a good language for the serious basic programmer.

Atari expects to market the guns that come with the XEGS for XL/XE users after Christmas, the package will include the gun and Bug Hunt, the game built in to the XEGS, there has been no mention of price.

G.O. Graphics will produce Desk Set, a Page Description Language for the Atari Laser Printer that will nearly rival Post Script, the premier Page Description Language. There is no word on the price but it's IBM version sells

If your in the market for some cheap 8 bit software, we will have a lot of it for sale at the January meeting. This is software that has been donated by club members so come out to the meeting, buy some software and help out the club.

R A M



HELP SUPPORT R.A.M.



## A REVIEW OF SUB BATTLE SIMULATOR by EPYX

This game came with a hat! After a quick glance through the manual, I donned the hat and tried to start. First problem! This game refuses to share the 520 ST with anything! The only way it would load was with a reset while it was in drive A. Not an auto load, you still had to click on the drive and double click the .PGM. It starts in the Training/Practice mode, so you have to halt that and select something else if you want. Your choices are German or American. After that you can select a Single Mission or a Wartime Command. Only the later will place your name and results in the Hall of Fame. You also choose the Difficulty level and in the case of a Single Mission, the year. A Wartime Command can take a couple of days to play, but you can save it and come back later. That is perhaps the most useful feature of this program. I might as well say right here that this game has the greatest potential, handicapped by a greater number of flaws. The graphics are OK. Simple, black only, ship silhouettes. Although they are done in great detail, it seems to cost in speed of display, big convoys nearly stop the action. There is crane boom on the fantail of a destroyer, although destroyers never had one. If leaving out a little detail would speed the action, it should have been done. Also the graphics crash sometimes but if you can endure they will be all right the next patrol. You will be assigned one of three types of subs depending on the year and scenario of the mission. It picks, you have no choice. You really miss the surface speed and aft torpedo tubes if you draw the S-boats or Type II, U-boats! In many cases the convoy is faster and you only have one slim chance to intercept. The difficulty levels decide how accurate both you and the enemy weapons are. Their's are always better than yours! In level 1 and 2 the enemy will show up on your map. In levels 3 & 4 they do not, leaving you to find them. at least the program will send you to General Quarters if they come into visual or radar range. Aircraft pop up too. You have anti-aircraft guns, but generally you will be damaged before you shoot them down. Also missing in the upper two levels is the Navigator mode. With this feature you can type in the coordinates (Lat. Long.) and it will take you there. You better have a good understanding of the Latitude Longitude system or you will never find your way to your patrol area without the Navigator. A small map is provided. Level 1 & 2 will also give you a deck gun on all sub models (some U-boats didn't have one), but the time between shots is increased as you go to higher levels. In any case the rate of fire is about as fast as a muzzel loading cannon!

You can control the sub with mouse or keyboard, but using both is



usually necessary. Keyboard/mouse polling is very slow. Coupled with slow graphics often means overshooting the view area, as the program catches up. Incoming fire seems to always be 'on time'. It is odd here, slow polling, yet you can't be sure that it isn't just slow in catching up? You can't tell if it didn't get your key-stroke or click, or just didn't have time to apply it yet!

One nice feature is that you can select where your view/periscope is pointing before you use it. This is real handy as you work into a firing position using sonar or map, then raise the scope to select the target. This way you don't have to find them, you can pre-position your scope. This feature is also true of Heading and Depth. You can pre-select and not worry about it. You can fire up to ten torpedoes at one time, and at multiple targets. There seems to be a set number of hits required to sink a certain ship. Three for a destroyer, four or five for a carrier, and five or six for a battleship. Too bad if you have an S-boat which only has four tubes. There are also a number of "Duds" on board! The biggest gripe is the "intelligence" given to the escorts. You can sink a 'st take off 90 degrees to the convoy course and an escort 50 miles away and circle you! You cannot escape them, rarely at any case. Any time you attack, all the escorts circle you, sometimes one or two will leave but return. That's where the program really departs from reality. The escorts (Destroyers, Escorts, and Patrol Boats) circle you using a 500 to 750ft. radius at 26 to 32 knots! First if ALL the escorts are pounding you, who is guarding the convoy? Assuming a ship could circle that tight at those speeds without major damage, sonar would be overwhelmed with all the noise. Sonar is not effective above 10 knots anyway. In one engagement I counted 12 escorts circling me. The same with aircraft. As long as a carrier is in range they will circle you and move along with you, even if you go to 700 feet, they can 'see' you! Now the best part... Stick your periscope up, at night, and an escort will fire on you and damage or sink you from 15,000 feet!!! Assume that a periscope is the size of a fence post, (about 4" for a night/scope, 1.5" for a day/scope), can you see one at three miles?...at night??? There is one way to 'cheat back', Save, save, save. I save the game at the beginning of each mission, then save prior to each engagement. This way if I get sunk, I can quit and load the saved game and try it again. In one case I tried one engagement 15 different ways and finally decided that I couldn't get away, so I let the convoy go by without firing. If you select the Wartime Command, you get graded after each patrol and it better be good or you get relieved of command and it is all over. It seems if you spend all the required time on station and never fire a shot you'll get a good enough score to move on. In one patrol, I left



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station and sank 12 ships. Then returned early, out of torpedoes, and shells. In this case, it took away my command I will allow that this is an accurate simulation of peacetime military attitude! The patrol orders are misleading in some cases, so that you cannot really get it right.

I wrote EPYX and complained about these 'errors' and others. After several months I got a reply which more or less addressed my complaints, and said that a new version was coming around Christmas. It has been more months, and nothing yet.

It is really sad. A team of programmers really went to a lot of work to make this interesting but for a few minor mistakes it really falls down. Even if you need the hat, I cannot recommend buying this program.

by Jim Hardin